Published in October 2016 by Gideon’s Army, the DWB report established twelve major findings. Their executive summary states, “Our report shows that ‘driving while black’ constitutes a unique series of risks, vulnerabilities, and dangers at the hands of the Metro Nashville Police Department (MNPD) that white drivers do not experience in the same way.” What was clear in this well-researched, methodologically sound document was that policing, especially the procedural traffic stop, was targeting black people at disproportionate rates to white drivers. The report cited that since 2012, a police policy, Operation Safer Streets (OSS) had resulted in more than 80% of those stops “yielding no evidence that warranted arrest.” These statistics and the full data of the report converged almost simultaneously with a vocalized desire by staff at the Divinity School to begin hosting community conversations with police on policing in Nashville and the use of force during traffic stops. Dean Emilie Townes thus formed an ad hoc committee for these purposes. And we began our talks with Gideon’s Army.
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Vanderbilt Divinity School begin to research, interview, and strategize in October of 2016. By November we had a draft of a Truth and Reconciliation Project plan and list of community members to interview. We were also tracking bills being introduced by Metro City Council like BILL NO. BL2016-483 (MENDES, GILMORE, M. JOHNSON) related to requiring MNPD (in addition to their quarterly and annual submission of crime reports to Metro Council) to submit of an annual traffic stop report.

On March 14, 2017 we hosted a community breakfast with Gideon’s Army (Rasheedaat Fetuga and Andrew Krinks) where they shared highlights from the Driving While Black report, intersectional injustice, racial profiling, and police brutality. Vanderbilt Divinity School (Amy Steele) reported on the newly organized Truth and Reconciliation Project its process and goals.
In early March we emailed invitations to a vast matrix of the Nashville community—houses of worship (Christian, Muslim, and Jewish) and clergy organizations, nonprofits working with economically disadvantaged communities, youth organizations, colleges and universities, city government officials, and criminal justice organizations and advocates, grassroots social justice organizations. Given the nature of these testimonies, we encouraged these leaders host in-house hearings first. We wanted to ensure that people providing testimony would have a community of people, who would continue to support them should they need help. We then sought recommendations from these groups on who would be willing to publicly testify. We also had an open call through the website whereby individuals could submit written testimonies of one significant experience they had had with MNPD in the last seven years.

“We wanted to ensure that people providing testimony would have a community of people, who would continue to support them should they need help.”

On Monday, February 27, 2017 we began corresponding with Chief Steve Anderson and his assistant Debbie Savage. After several emails he agreed to meet on April 20, 2017 at 10:00am with one representative of the Truth and Reconciliation Project committee at the Hermitage precinct. Chief Anderson declined our invitation to participate in the project or even to send an MNPD representative to witness our proceedings on the grounds that we were not an established group. Instead, he communicated interest in reading our report, but not participating in the process.

We went forward anyway with three hearings and twelve testifiers. Volunteers helped us with sign-in sheets for folks coming to listen. We recruited additional listeners from the community to sit on the panel and be in proximity to the people testifying. We talked with each group of testifiers before these hearing to gain their signed informed consent. And we invited a moderator to open and facilitate each hearing.
From these Truth and Reconciliation hearings VDS wanted:

(1) to further develop a Citizen Oversight Board,

(2) to understand and challenge policing policy and procedure in Nashville, beginning with a commitment by the police to reassess its policy and procedures and treatment of communities of color,

(3) to negotiate a community covenant would include ten expectations for how we treat each other in the process of human centered policing in the community to preempt the phenomenon of police brutality and violence toward police in Nashville, and

(4) to develop continuing education seminars on race/ethnicity, gender/sexuality, community centered policing, and restorative justice.
Prior to the hearings, in the information gathering stage, we conducted five community interviews with individuals in church civic, judicial, and grassroots organizational leadership who stated their interest in wanting several items addressed by MNPD: a deepening moral commitment [to the black community], more police accountability and public remorse for its wrongs, reduction of traffic stops, more educational partnerships to address various aspects of the problem (including consulting VU experts on conference calls where experts teach in these various areas, modeled after the Center for Public Health Advocacy in Maryland, an evidence-based advocacy institute).
Each session was two-hours. Each was organized with a panel of persons including a moderator, listeners—asked to record handwritten notes of the testimonies and any insights they gained while listening, the testifiers, and the audience members from Vanderbilt and the surrounding Nashville community. The committee was immensely proud of the people who testified because we feared that doing so would draw some backlash from MNPD. This project centered on their testimonies.

**MARCH 28**

youtube.com/watch?v=DeeKmGZCaus

**Moderator**

Prof. Forrest Harris

Associate Professor of the Practice of Ministry

**Listeners**

Amy Steele

assistant dean for student life

Prof. Phillis I. Sheppard

associate professor of religion, psychology, and culture

**Testifiers**

AK “Khaos” Thomas, Terrance Bush, Calvin McGill, Mansa Rashidii, and John Kelly

**APRIL 22**

youtube.com/watch?v=ynKvqcCpoFA&feature=youtu.be

**Moderator**

Prof. Herbert Marbury

Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible

**Listeners**

Jared Mollenkopf

Public Defender’s office

Andrew Krinks, Ph.D. student in Theological Studies

**Testifiers**

Clemmie Greenlee

Joseph Woodard

Jarvis Phillips
MAY 16
youtube.com/watch?v=QvgZ8EvVDPo&t=30s

Moderator
Rev. Davie Tucker, pastor Beechcreek Missionary Baptist Church

Listeners
Courtney Bryant, Ph.D. student in Ethics and Society
Zac Settles, Ph.D. student in Theological Studies
Prof. Joerg Rieger, Cal Turner Chancellor’s Chair of Wesleyan Studies
Prof. Phillis I. Sheppard, Associate Professor of Religion, Psychology and Culture

Testifiers
Tamika Lewis,² Michael Harris, Devan Franklin, Keno Hill, Leslie Davis

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² Tamika Lewis is the mother of Jocques Clemmons two children. Clemmons was fatally shot during a traffic stop in Nashville on February 10, 2017. On May 11, 2017 the district attorney decided not to prosecute the officer Josh Lippert, who killed Clemmons. In August 2017 the case was closed by three federal agencies. Ms. Lewis was not able to testify in our hearing today.
Each hearing provides the personal narratives of Nashville residents’ experiences with MNPD. These are just a few of the quotes collected from the testimonies:

“I never though I’d hear myself say this, but at my age my greatest fear is a traffic stop.”

“I’ve experienced such things as illegal searches, use of racial slurs, other derogatory language, even excessive force to the point of physical injury. I’ve been left with a bloody nose and a bruised sternum just to give you an idea.”

“He asked me, license registration, insurance, I had all that. But he goes back to the car, comes back, and says, “hey can I search the car.” I’m like, “no you can’t search the car. I’m just trying to get home. So, he keeps talking to me, asking where am I going, what am I doing out? And long story short he asked me again could he search the car and I’m like no, you still can’t search the car, just write my ticket let me go. So, he said wait twenty minutes until we call the dog out.”

‘I haven’t really gotten physically harassed. I more got like mentally harassed. You know what I mean.”

“And__ some of the experiences I’ve had with the Nashville police department, I feel like they don’t consider me to be a human being.”

“For example, out East, we’ve gotten pulled over I don’t know how many times. First thing they do is ask us, “what gang ya’ll claiming? Where ya’ll going? Why ya’ll always riding down the street, as if they monitoring us. Whose house is that that ya’ll came from...they’re watching us. We know what they’re doing.”
“After I got the Mercedes, I had no right to drive one. I was pulled over every single time I came out of [my house] and got in my car. It was either that I didn’t turn on my blinker, or the windows were too tinted, or I didn’t stop for a stop sign. It was always something crazy three or four times a week not a month.”

“He walks up to the car and first thing he asks is, “Ugh, ya’ll got any weapons, drugs, or anything like that in the car?” Weapons, drugs—first question. Like no sir. “You mind if I search your vehicle?”

“I’m afraid every day that I wake up that I’m going to be accused, fit the description, or in end up in the wrong place at the right time.”
Emilie M. Townes, Ph.D.
Dean of the Divinity School
E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Professor of Womanist Ethics and Society

C. Melissa Snarr, Ph.D.
Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, Associate Professor of Ethics and Society

Amy E. Steele, Ph.D.
Assistant Dean for Student Life

Forrest E. Harris, Sr., D.Min.
Director of the Kelly Miller Smith Institute on the African American Church
Associate Professor of the Practice of Ministry

Andrew Krinks
Ph.D. Candidate, Vanderbilt University
Graduate Department of Religion

Rasheedat Fetuga, B.S.
Founder, Gideon’s Army
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https://divinity.vanderbilt.edu/news/tandrproject.php